AN APPARENTLY NEW SPECIES OF *MORDELLISTENA* (COL.: MORDELLIDAE) IN BRITAIN

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***Mordellistena* (*Pseudomordellina*) *imitatrix* sp.n.**

VERY CLOSELY allied to and greatly resembling *M.* (*P.*) *acuticollis* Schilsky, from which it differs in the form and disposition of the hind-tibial ridges – a character of recognised importance in the genus. The foodplant is also different.

A small black species with yellowish or greyish-yellow pubescence; male with clypeus, mouthparts, front coxae and more or less of the femora reddish or yellowish, mid-femora often darker reddish or pitchy; female with these parts darker to pitchy-black. Antennae with base rather obscurely lighter, they and the palpi longer and stouter in male. Hind tibiae with only one pair of apical spurs. This will serve equally as a rough description of *M. acuticollis* (*cf.* also Allen, 1986: 49-50; Batten, 1986: 232-3). Male parameres not or scarcely different in the two species, which may be separated as follows:-

1/2 The two upper ridges on outer face of hind tibia thick, straight and ending abruptly, the foremost plainly ceasing further from base of tibia (about as fig. 1). On *Artemisia vulgaris* L. . . . . *.imitatrix* sp.n.

2/1 The two upper ridges thinner and longer, not ending abruptly but appearing to curve into, or towards, the longitudinal axis of tibia, the foremost approaching obviously nearer to the base (about as fig. 2). On *cirsium arvense* Scop. . . . . *acuticollis* Schil.

South-east England: in various localities mostly in west Kent from 1992 onwards. Holotype male (eventually) in coll. Natural History Museum, London: Woolwich Common, west Kent (south-east London), 15.vii.1992, A.A. Allen. Paratypes (same locality and captor, 4.vii.1993) in the collections of the following persons and institutions: J. Horák (Prague), the Natural History Museum (London), Manchester Museum, P.F. Whitehead (Pershore), J. Cooter (Hereford), and the author.

I first encountered this species on 15.vii.92, when two males were shaken off different plants of the *Artemisia* a short distance apart on Woolwich Common: no more were found that year. Though appearing to be *A. acuticollis,* the differing host-association raised serious doubts. Only later, when the hind-tibial ridges were seen to differ appreciably, was it clear that we had here yet another addition to the British *Mordellistena* spp. – and moreover, one not yet identifiable from the available literature.

The following year, a search on 20th June resulted in two further specimens at each of the above sites; from which, on the 23rd, my friend Professor J.A. Owen obtained a few. On the warm evening of 4th July, one of the two sites yielded numerous examples, the smallest among them scarcely larger than *M. nanuloides* Ermisch. An attempt was made to

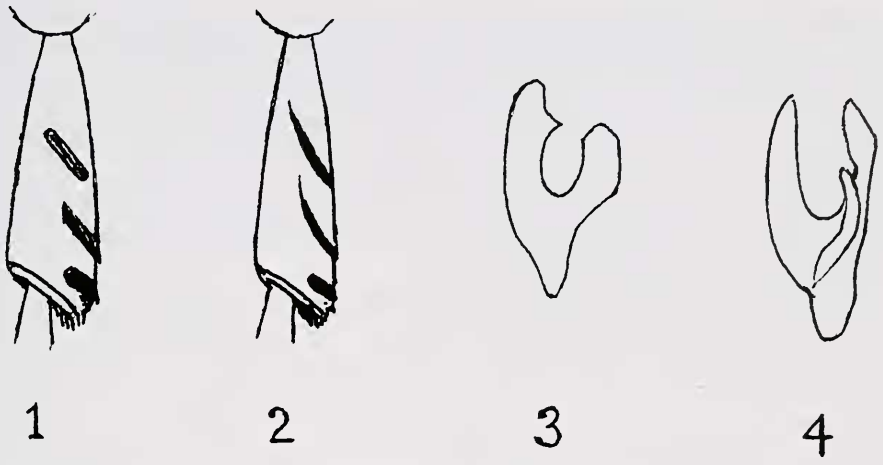
ascertain the beetle's status on the common, where the foodplant is very patchily distributed. It showed *M. imitatrix* to be, at the time at least, very local and almost confined to the two mugwort plants on which it was first found. A few specimens occurred in another area well separated from the original one; but the species seemed absent from the rest of the common, though several scattered but vigorous stands of the *Artemisia* were well worked. A less thorough search in other parts of the general area also gave a negative result. Last year, 1994, *M. imitatrix* was not seen. The very hot and extremely drying weather of July may have affected its life-cycle; but in any case, it was not actively sought.

Early in August 1993 Mr P.J. Hodge met with the same insect on the same plant along a field edge near Staines, Middlesex, where it was abundant. In August 1994 he found it at Addington, near Maidstone, and Professor Owen at Darenth in mid-July and early August; at these two places in west Kent it was again on the mugwort.

It will be seen that all finds of *M. imitatrix* to date (and there may have been others unknown to me) have taken place within the remarkably short space of three years – a phenomenon pointing to very recent invasion and the still active colonisation of new ground. No doubt the beetle is already present in many other places in the home counties, and new finds may confidently be predicted over the ensuing years. Clearly therefore it is necessary to have a name by which to refer to the species, even if it should later prove to have been described. Mr Jan Horák, in Prague, is engaged on a thorough revision of the genus, but it may be some time before he reaches the group to which the present species belongs.

It can safely be asserted that any *Mordellistena* with only one pair of hind-tibial spurs, occurring inland on *Artemisia vulgaris* in south-east England, will almost certainly be *M. imitatrix*. Doubt may, however, arise with casual specimens taken by general sweeping, and any such will need careful inspection as it might prove to be *M. acuticollis*. This latter, of which only three British specimens are yet known, appears to affect *Cirsium arvense* (creeping thistle) – *cf.* Ermisch, p. 187; Batten, p. 233 – an association not so far proved for Britain, however. It must also be remembered that other species of the genus may possibly live on *A. vulgaris,* notably *M. parvula* (Gyll.) – quite apart from *M. nanuloides* Erm. on the coastal *A. maritima*.

In practice, the difference in the hind-tibial ridges may not always be as clear-cut and satisfactory as one could wish. Not only is there some variation, but the ridges can be hard to see at first, and their appearance may change with the angle of incident light and the position of its source. It may require a fine adjustment of the lighting to bring them fully into view. They often show up best in a specimen mounted on its side; or when a hind leg is removed and mounted flat, outer face up. Discrimination may occasionally be difficult without a knowledge of the foodplant.



Figs. 1-4: *Mordellistena* spp. *M. imitatrix* sp.n.:
1. outer face of hind tibia; 3. left paramere; 4. right paramere.
M. acuticollis Schils.:
2. outer face of hind tibia.

References

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Batten, R., 1986. A review of the British Mordellidae (Coleoptera). *Entomologist's Gaz.* **37**: 225-235.

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"Of all the cars, in all the world . . ."

Some years ago someone gave me a *Times* newspaper cutting which related how a South African Lycaenid, *Cacyreus marshalli* Butler, 1898, had arrived in Belgium with, it was thought, a pot of geraniums. I confess it wasn't particularly interesting at the time and I gave it no further thought.

Mid-day in the southern Spanish city of Granada was sweltering on the 12th of July 1994. The temperature was well into the 40s and I was sat in my camper-van at the head of a long queue of traffic, waiting for the traffic lights to change. They appeared to have been red for an age and I was idly watching the passers-by, when suddenly a tiny grey moth fluttered weakly on the inside of the quarterlight next to the driver's open window; it took a full second to register that the moth had tails and that it was actually a very "foreign" lycaenid butterfly.

Sod's Law immediately came into play and several things happened at once. I made a move to close the window; the butterfly flopped from the quarterlight to become lodged behind the altimeter attached to the dashboard by a velcro strip and – of course – the lights changed to green.

Somewhere in my van is a male *Plebicula sagratrox* Aistleitner 1986, which had disappeared down the side of a seat a couple of weeks previously, never to be seen again. Having learned that lesson the hard way, there was